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LETTER

**MAJESTY'S SHERIFFS-DEPUTE
IN SCOTLAND,**

RECOMMENDING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF FOUR NATIONAL
ASYLUMS FOR THE RECEPTION OF CRIMINAL AND
PAUPER LUNATICS,

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LETTER

TO THE

Sheriffs-Depute of Scotland.

GENTLEMEN,

It may perhaps seem presumptuous in a private individual to address a printed Letter to a respectable body of the Judges of the Land : But I trust you will consider it a sufficient apology for my conduct, that I can with truth assure you, I am actuated by no other motives but an earnest desire to serve the cause of humanity, to promote the interest of my native country, and to wipe off what I have long considered as a national disgrace to the enlightened and flourishing kingdom of Scotland. At my period of life, past three score
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and ten, you will hardly suspect that I have either private enmity to gratify or a successful rival to oppose. From the present publication I have not the most distant prospect either of fame or profit. All the return I expect from this Address to you, is some share of that satisfaction which every liberal mind must derive from an honest endeavour to promote the public good: And I trust I need say nothing more to induce you to bestow upon it a serious consideration.

Soon after I settled as a Physician in Edinburgh, now near fifty years ago, I was requested to visit the late Mr Robert Ferguson, well known to his countrymen as a Scottish Poet of no mean abilities. I found him in a very deplorable condition, subjected to furious insanity. He lived in the house of his Mother, an old Widow, in very narrow circumstances. Her feeble and aged state, the situation of her dwelling-house, and several other circumstances, rendered it impossible to make any attempts towards his cure, with the slightest prospect of advantage, while he remained at home. After several fruitless attempts to have him placed in a more desirable situation, he was at last removed to the Bedlam of the City of Edinburgh,

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There also I continued my visits to him, in conjunction with my late worthy friend Mr Alexander Wood, who had at that time the charge of the Medical Department of the Edinburgh Poor-house, and of the Bedlam attached to it. Without a convalescence from his insanity, death soon put a period to poor Ferguson's existence.

His case, however, afforded me an opportunity of witnessing the deplorable situation of Pauper Lunatics, even in the opulent, flourishing, and charitable Metropolis of Scotland. The Loss of Reason is perhaps the most deplorable disease to which a rational being can be subjected ; and, in my opinion, it is impossible to conceive a more interesting object of charity than the Man of Genius when a Pauper Lunatic. In every enlightened State, therefore, which has a just claim to civilization, it is the duty of a humane Legislature to furnish every proper accommodation for their security, and for their recovery ; and it is the duty of every humane Individual to use his humble endeavours towards the accomplishment of this most desirable end.

Since the period I have mentioned, my feeble endeavours have been steadily directed to the erection

erection of a well constructed Lunatic Asylum at Edinburgh ; and it is with some satisfaction I can say, that these endeavours have been attended with at least some benefit to unfortunate Maniacs in Edinburgh.

When I had the honour of being President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh, in the year 1790, and, in consequence of that appointment, an *ex officio* Manager of the Edinburgh Charity Work-House, on the very first day after my election, I paid an official visit to the Bedlam of Edinburgh : And I am happy to say, that now, under the superintendance of my worthy friend, Dr George Wood, the Son and Successor of his Father, than whom a more benevolent man has seldom existed, and who, more perhaps than any other man, deplored the evils necessarily connected with the situation of Bedlam, several of those evils have been remedied ; and, besides the improvements of Bedlam, some progress has been made in the erection of a Lunatic Asylum at Edinburgh, which, if it shall ever be completed, will afford every convenience for Lunatics of all ranks. Still, however, the Bedlam of Edinburgh, even in its most improved state, does not afford to

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the Pauper Lunatic that chance of recovery which an enlightened and charitable nation must be anxious to furnish: Nor is that defect supplied by the small portion of the Asylum at Morning-side, which is now built in the vicinity of Edinburgh.

If, however, there be a deficiency of the proper accommodation for pauper Lunatics, even at Edinburgh, proper conveniences are still more wanting, at most other parts of Scotland ;—and, it must be acknowledged, that, in this respect, we are much behind our fellow subjects in England. Of late years, very important improvements have been made in our sister kingdom of England, on this important subject. The new Bethlem Hospital of London, and St Luke's Hospital in that City, are monuments of well directed charity, not perhaps equalled in any nation in Europe. But, besides the Lunatic Asylums in the Metropolis, commodious accommodation, for the cure of pauper, and for the confinement of criminal Lunatics, is provided in many different parts of England. For this purpose, two acts of Parliament have lately been passed, the one on the 23d of June 1808, entitled, *An act for the better care and*

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maintenance of Lunatics, being Paupers or Criminals, in England; the other, dated the 5th of June 1811, entitled, *An act to amend an act of the 48th year of his present Majesty, for the better care and maintenance of Lunatics, being Paupers or Criminals, in England*. For these two acts, England is chiefly indebted to the humanity of that enlightened Philosopher, and aimable Philanthropist, Sir George Paul, and to the exertions in Parliament of that truly patriotic Member of the House of Commons, the Honourable Henry Gray Bennet. By these judicious acts, England is now provided, not only in the capital, but over the whole kingdom, with safe and proper accommodation both for pauper and criminal Lunatics.

But if the kingdom of Scotland be still deficient in proper accommodation for the cure of pauper Lunatics, it is even much more deficient in the necessary prisons for criminal Lunatics. Although the humanity of the British Laws has wisely enacted, that no insane person, even when he commits murder, should be the subject of a capital punishment, yet no Lunatic committing a heinous crime should pass unpunished, or should afterwards be allowed to be at large. Whatever his rank may be, he should be a prisoner for life,

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and undergoing a certain degree of punishment as a warning to other Lunatics.

In Scotland, however, the degree of punishment inflicted, on the one hand, on the Rich, and on the other, on the Pauper criminal Lunatic, is shockingly unequal. With regard to the Rich, all that is at present required is, that the relations shall find security, that the unfortunate Lunatic shall be restrained from doing farther mischief. They are allowed to place him where they please, and to supply him with every indulgence, with every luxury. Not many years have elapsed, since I have myself seen a male who shot his brother, and a female who poisoned her mother, living, I may say, at almost perfect freedom, and without any punishment, which might have a tendency to deter other maniacs from committing similar crimes.

But if, in Scotland, the punishment of the Rich criminal Lunatic be too slight, that of Pauper criminals is often too severe. Where there are no funds to support them, and no relations to take charge of them, they are, in general, committed to the most dismal cells of a loathsome jail, where, deprived of the pure air and cleanliness necessary for the support of human life, they must in general

general, fall victims to a lingering death, worse than hanging. And notwithstanding the humanity of our laws, I can say without either hesitation or exaggeration, that I have known several instances of legal murders, if I may be allowed the expression, committed on unfortunate Lunatics, by the damp cells of loathsome jails.

This deplorable deficiency in Scotland, both in the case of pauper and criminal Lunatics, is a well known fact. It is not, therefore, wonderful, that attempts should have been made on different occasions to remedy it, by an act of the Legislature. But I need not tell you, Gentlemen, that all these attempts have hitherto proved abortive. Not many months have elapsed, since a bill to remedy the evils I have stated, was brought into the House of Commons. Of the merits of that intended act of Parliament, very different opinions have been entertained. At several County meetings, where it has been taken under consideration, strong resolutions have been adopted for opposing it ; and these resolutions have been published to the country at large in different newspapers, by authority.

Of the benefits which would result from Lord Binning's proposed bill, or of the evils which would flow from it, I shall not presume to say anything.

thing. With both the one and the other, you, from your official duty, are better acquainted than I can pretend to be. Permit me, however, to observe, that, in my opinion, there is not one man in the kingdom of Scotland, who enjoys the blessing of a sound understanding, and has paid due attention to the miserable situation of criminal and pauper Lunatics, who will not consider Lord Binning as entitled to the warmest thanks of his country, for his good intentions.

When now, however, I venture to address you on the same subject, it is to propose another plan for remedying those disgraceful evils which it was the object of his bill to remove. This, I think, may be easily accomplished, in a manner which will not at least be liable to many of the objections which were stated to his intended bill.

I am fully persuaded, that four Asylums for pauper and criminal Lunatics, might be established in Scotland,—one at Edinburgh for the East Quarter, another at Glasgow for the West, a third at Dumfries for the South, and a fourth at Aberdeen for the North Quarter of the kingdom of Scotland, for the sum of L. 40,000, L. 10,000 being allotted for each Quarter. That sum for the whole kingdom of Scotland,

at present enjoying the blessings of peace, plenty and prosperity, will certainly not be considered as too great a sacrifice to humanity, or too dear a price for wiping off so great a national disgrace. The sum raised, and already expended in England, under authority of the two acts of Parliament which I have already mentioned, is much greater in proportion, even when making full allowance for the superior opulence and extent of that kingdom.

When, however, I propose the accomplishment of so important an object at so small an expence as L. 10,000 for each quarter of Scotland, it may naturally be expected that I should point out the mode in which it may be obtained. My plan for this purpose is very nearly similar to what you will find mentioned in a Pamphlet published about six years ago, intituled, ‘ A Short Account of the ‘ Rise, Progress, and present State of the Lunatic ‘ Asylum at Edinburgh. Sold by A. Constable ‘ and Co.—Price 2s. 6d.’

In that Pamphlet, it is proposed, that, by an Act of the Legislature, four Asylums for criminal and pauper Lunatics should be established in Scotland: One at Dumfries for the South, another at Edinburgh

Edinburgh for the East, a third at Glasgow for the West, and a fourth at Aberdeen for the North. I need not tell you, Gentlemen, that at all these four towns, by the exertions of benevolent individuals, Asylums for the Insane have lately been begun to be built, on a very improved plan; and I am assured, on the most respectable authority, that all these Lunatic Asylums are under the most judicious management. My plan is to give to each of these Establishments, the sum of L. 10,000 for constructing additional buildings for the reception of criminal and pauper Lunatics, under certain regulations, to be fixed by Parliament. I would propose, that to the Ordinary Managers already appointed, there should be superadded, as *ex officio* Managers, for these additional buildings, the Sheriffs-Depute of all the Counties in Scotland; those for Wigton, Kirkcudbright, Dumfries, and Ayr, being *ex officio* Managers of the Asylum for the Southern District; those of Roxburgh, Selkirk, Berwick, Peebles, Haddington, Edinburgh, Linlithgow, Stirling, Fife, Kinross, Clackmannan and Perth, for the Eastern; those of Lanark, Renfrew, Dumbarton, Bute and Argyle, for the Western; and, finally, those of Angus,

gus, Kincardine, Aberdeen, Banff, Moray, Nairn, Cromarty, Inverness, Ross, Sutherland, Caithness and Orkney, being *ex officio* Managers of the National Asylum for the Northern District of Scotland.

There cannot, I think, be a doubt, that under the administration of the benevolent Managers already acting, aided by the Sheriffs-Depute of Scotland, every thing regarding the building proper Asylums for dangerous Lunatics, and every thing respecting their future support, would be conducted with the most judicious economy. Dangerous but unfortunate Lunatics, who are at present supported, either on their own funds, or on the poors funds of the parish to which they belong, and who are confined in prisons shocking to humanity, would there be treated with every comfort of which their situation admits, with safety to the Public. And I need not add, that a very considerable annual expence would be saved by the proposed union of the National Asylums for Criminals and Paupers, with the four Asylums already established in the Cities I have mentioned.

The sum of L. 10,000 from each of the quarters of Scotland which have been pointed out,

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might, in my opinion, be easily collected by an equitable Parliamentary Assessment, and at almost no expence. It might be collected in every county in conjunction with house-tax. A very small addition to the house-tax, one *per cent.*, for example, *per annum*, till the requisite sum be collected, would soon be sufficient for answering the whole demand. And I can hardly allow myself to suppose, that there is a sensible or humane householder in the whole kingdom of Scotland, who would not chearfully pay that inconsiderable additional house-tax for the accomplishment of an object so imperiously demanded by a due regard both for humanity and justice.

Under the sanction and with the security of an act of Parliament for repaying the money, the sum of L. 10,000 might be, with perfect ease, immediately borrowed by the Managers of each of the four Asylums which I have mentioned. Thus, in the course even of not many months, by the erection of proper National Asylums, a deficiency, highly disgraceful to a humane and enlightened nation, might be completely removed throughout the whole kingdom of Scotland.

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Permit me, therefore, to request, that you, Gentlemen, will take whatever mode you think best, of communicating this proposal to the Freeholders and other Inhabitants of your respective Counties. And if this outline of my plan shall meet with general approbation, I have little doubt, that, by means of Lord Binning, or some other patriotic Scotsman, it may soon obtain the sanction of the British Parliament.

I have the honour to be,

Your most obedient servant,

ANDREW DUNCAN *Sen.*